

WHAT KIND OF ROLE DOES DESIGN PLAY IN THE SUCCESS OF RETAIL FORMATS SUCH AS MALLS?

Design has a huge role to play in the success of retail formats. The best tenants want to be a part of the best design story. We want to attract really good tenants into our malls, both Indian as well as international brands, particularly those that have not been to India before. To get these tenants to come, we have to provide them a design that is excellent, above standard and something innovative that they can aspire to be a part of.

IS THERE ANY SUCCESS FORMULA FOR MALL DESIGN?

There is not always a success formula. Rather the formula continues to evolve over the years as tenants evolve. But some of the things hold true from one country to another. These include wide corridors and high ceilings where the tenants will be able to express their work and their brand. It is important for a designer to understand who the shopper or guest is and be able to design properties keeping their preferences in mind. For me, it does not matter whether I am designing malls in India, China or South Africa. There are always some things which hold true.



Donna P. Childs, Principal, TVSDesign

“Malls the world over are increasingly becoming more hospitality-focussed”

DESIGN IS A VERY CRUCIAL ELEMENT IN THE SUCCESS OF A MALL BECAUSE IT HELPS CREATE A PLEASANT AMBIENCE THAT GENERATES MORE WALK-INS FOR THE PROPERTY. DONNA P. CHILDS, PRINCIPAL WITH THE US-BASED DESIGN FIRM TVSDSIGN, SAYS THERE IS NO SUCCESSFUL FORMULA FOR A GOOD MALL DESIGN BUT SOME THINGS HOLD TRUE WORLDWIDE. IN A FREEWHEELING CHAT WITH PRIYANKA DASGUPTA, SHE TALKS ABOUT THE LATEST TRENDS IN MALL DESIGN AND HOW INDIAN MALLS ARE DIFFERENT.

WHAT ARE THE ESSENTIAL PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN THAT ONE NEEDS TO FOCUS ON WHILE DESIGNING MALLS?

One of the major things to consider while designing malls is, how is the light going to enter the building. Will natural light be a major focus of the property or do we want to create more of a sculptural effect with it. Also, designers need to ensure that the property looks very aspirational because this element plays a huge role. They need to keep in mind the consumers' comfort – whether they feel relaxed and well taken care of.

Another important part of design is high-quality finish. Instead of designing a mall that is utilitarian, one has to think of the aspirational quotient because it is so important. The designer has to bring forward materials that are new to the market or to use them in an innovative way that nobody has thought of before.

Then comes the overall ambience. Instead of creating something that is the same as others, the designer has to create an element of surprise and an element of entertainment. Visitors need to be visually entertained.

WHAT IS YOUR DEFINITION OF A GOOD DESIGN IN TERMS OF RETAIL REAL ESTATE?

There is no standard definition of good design as such. There are certain

elements that are critical to good design. The planning part is very important. No matter how great the design is, if there is no proper plan in terms of where the anchors and tenants are located, you are never going to get a success story.

IN WHAT WAY ARE MALLS EVOLVING? WHAT ARE LATEST TRENDS THAT YOU ARE SEEING IN THIS SPACE?

A major trend is to move away from a typical mall environment into something that is more hospitality-focused. Such property has more

designing. This strategy has been hugely successful globally. Zonal merchandising creates a lot of energy for a property.

Also, the word 'anchor' has been completely redefined lately for malls. Anchors continue to be an intrinsic part of a mall property but these may no longer be departmental stores. Even a food court or grocery store can become an anchor. **In our mall at Mohali in India**, we have turned fashion brands like Lifestyle and Marks & Spencer into anchors, which will help draw the crowds.



The Triangle Town Center in Raleigh, North Carolina, designed by TVSDesign
Photo By: Brain Gassel

elements that you will typically find in a hotel. It offers more comfort and convenience, and is more service-oriented. This is the age of e-commerce, which is a solid competition to offline retail. So when visitors come to a mall, we try to ensure that they have a good time with their family and friends and get the kind of experience that a hotel provides. The hospitality look-and-feel of malls is a big trend currently.

Another huge shift is happening in terms of zonal merchandising where you have dedicated areas for different categories such as high fashion and entertainment. You group your tenants according to the theme rather than spreading them out in the mall. This is something we are going to do in the **North County Mall** at Mohali that we are

Another huge international trend is mixed use. We can increasingly see the presence of offices, car dealer showrooms, pharmacies and grocery stores within the mall space. This gives a community-centre kind of feeling to the property, catering to all your requirements. We are also trying to bring these international best practices to the **North County mall** that we are designing in India.

ARE MIXED USE DEVELOPMENTS BETTER THAN SINGLE-USE FORMAT?

It is all about offering everything a person wants (mixed use) versus meeting only one of his needs (single use). The mixed-use format allows a lot more things to happen inside a mall. Also, from a developer's point of view, a mixed-use property offers more ways to bring in profit.



King of Prussia mall in Pennsylvania, USA, designed by TVSDesign
Photo by: Brain Gassel

IN TERMS OF MALL SIZES, WHAT IS THE TREND WORLDWIDE?

It depends on which part of the world you are in. In the US, malls are shrinking in size and getting more urbane. In China and South America, they are getting bigger. There is no single trend that is common everywhere. It is a function of the economy. India, for instance, has a robust economy. Indians are building malls for the first time, so bigger seems to be better for them.

WHAT ARE THE LATEST TRENDS IN THE LOOK AND FEEL OF MALLS?

Higher ceilings and use of natural light done in a way that it is dramatic but not just for the sake of it. We designers have become very energy conscious now. We are very careful how we use light and make it a part of the mall experience. Internationally, it is higher ceilings everywhere.

Another popular trend is happening around food courts. For over 20 years, malls have been designing their food courts in the exact same way. It is time for a change. The basic formula of a food court still works but people are kind of tired cuddled into a small space in a mall and eating their food in a crowded setting. So we are changing the food court concept into a dining destination, where the tenants are becoming chefs on

display, as opposed to earlier when visitors went to a counter to get their food.

The second thing that we are doing is exploding the food court. So you no longer find food confined to food courts only. Typically, customers belonging to any demography, any age, enjoy food with family and friends. So we are spreading food to different corners of the mall as an indication to visitors to slow down, halt and take some rest.

Some latest trends in malls involve higher ceilings and use of natural light done in a way that it is dramatic but not just for the sake of it. We are also very careful how we use natural light.

WE ARE EXPLODING THE FOOD COURT, SO YOU NO LONGER FIND FOOD CONFINED TO FOOD COURTS ONLY. WE ARE SPREADING FOOD TO DIFFERENT CORNERS OF THE MALL AS AN INDICATION TO VISITORS TO SLOW DOWN AND TAKE SOME REST.

Also, in a food court you would typically see hundreds of chairs lying everywhere with no boundaries. The new food courts will have boundaries between seating, creating a more intimate eating arrangement which one can enjoy with family and friends.

WHAT ABOUT ENTERTAINMENT CENTRES AT MALLS?

Definitely, we are redefining entertainment. Typically, we would like to use entertainment as an anchor not only at the end but also

at the top. This way we are moving people up. Entertainment can be food, movies, and games, among others. It depends on the kind of demography you are in and the kind of age group you want to attract, and understand what entertainment means to them.

WHAT ABOUT TECHNOLOGY AT MALLS?

Technology is playing a great role in retail. Malls need to have WiFi connectivity in specific zones to attract the teen population. This trend is already there in Europe, has made its way to the US. I see no reason why it would not come to India. It is a great way to connect to the young crowd who are so hooked on to their gadgets and sell your products. As designers we need to understand how to incorporate these kind of technologies into the design structure.

HOW ARE INDIAN MALLS DIFFERENT FROM REST OF THE WORLD?

There are two elements to this: the planning aspect and design. From the planning aspect, the tenants have been a lot smaller in India, while in other countries the tenants have been much larger space-wise. For the stores that we are developing in our mall at Mohali, the sizes are much bigger and more Western in look and feel. That is what international tenants are expecting. I think DLF Emporio in Delhi has managed to achieve global standards to a large extent in terms of more space for tenants. I see other Indian malls upgrading in that direction soon.

HOW WILL MALLS LOOK LIKE IN FUTURE?

We will see the lease lines going away. In a mall, there is a common area and then there are the lease lines, both separated by glass doors. The doors are there for security issues. With technological advancement, these issues will be taken care of. The tenants will then have more options to experiment with the look and feel of their stores. They are going to reinvent themselves and the entire mall will start looking more like a huge department store. ☒